

Kavaler-Adler, S. (2017). The dark side of creativity: Compulsions, blocks, and creations. *MindConsiliums*, 17(4), 1-29.

THE DARK SIDE OF CREATIVITY: COMPULSIONS, BLOCKS, AND CREATIONS  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the interplay of the *compulsion to create* and the *demon lover complex* in well-known women artists and writers who have suffered primal preoedipal trauma (such as Emily Dickinson, Edith Sitwell, Emily Bronte, and Sylvia Plath), and who manifest a developmental arrest that undermines a capacity to mourn primal loss without treatment. This contrasts with those who have a free motivation to create, and a capacity to mourn and heal themselves within their creative work (such as Charlotte Bronte and Suzanne Farrell). Poetic and biographical material will be offered to describe this contrast.

On the other side of the *dark side of creativity* spectrum is the syndrome of *writing blocks*. The last part of this paper offers some case process from a four times a week psychoanalytic patient, who gradually resolves a major block to creative self expression, in writing, through mourning trauma, primal losses, and disillusionments within the holding environment and “container” of an object relations psychoanalytic treatment process. The point is made that repression plays a dominant role in creative blocks, while splitting and dissociation play the main role in compulsions within the creative process, where addiction to an eroticized internal “bad” object is symptomatic of a pathological state, consequent to primal trauma.

*Keywords: creativity, dark side of creativity, writing blocks, developmental mourning, demon-lover complex, object relations psychoanalysis, creative blocks, compulsion to create, creative mystique, bad objects, eroticized bad object, holding environment, psychic container.*

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...Sylvia Plath speaks to her God/Daddy who haunted her and compelled her creativity

*You do not, you do not do,  
Black shoe,  
In which I have lived like a foot for 30 years,  
Poor and White,  
Barely able to breathe or achool!  
Daddy I have had to kill you  
You died before I had time,  
Marble Heavy, A Bag full of God  
With one gray toe  
Big as a Frisco Seal*

(Sylvia Plath's Ariel poem "Daddy" [1961] was written right before her suicide at the age of 30)

### ***The Demon Lover and the Demon Lover Complex***

Sylvia Plath was one of many women artists and writers whom I have written about in two books: *The Compulsion to Create: Women Writers and Their Demon Lovers*, and *The Creative Mystique: From Red Shoes Frenzy to Love and Creativity*. These brilliant creative women suffered early life trauma that caused them to feel possessed by an internal *demon lover* figure, who forced them to submit to a sadistic dominance. The *demon lover* would extinguish both the voice and the life of the women, even as they agonized to express their unique artistic vision. The origins of this Demon Lover figure extend back to traumatized disruptions of mothering in their first three years of life, when the individual subjective, integrated, and individuated self is first forming. This primal mother loss is often combined with the loss of an idealized father figure. The traumatized women, suffering a developmental arrest from trauma, repeat the trauma over and over again in their literary and artistic work. The repeated trauma takes the form of a *demon lover* theme that can become a *demon lover complex*. The *demon lover complex* is also a pathological mourning state in Object Relations terms, since the female artist has become addicted to an eroticized "bad object." Such primal addiction interferes with any preoedipal internalization of a good-enough mother or good-enough maternal environment or maternal relatedness. It is when early preoedipal mothering fails that the tenacious tie to an idealized mother-father God keeps flipping over into a malignant *demon lover* God or muse. This results from the perpetual repetition of primal splitting within the psyche of the woman artist. The whole trauma plays itself out repeatedly in the woman's *internal world*. It is, therefore, part of the fantasy creations within the artistic/literary work of the woman. When the death of the father, or the patriarchal control of the father, accompanies the

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primal mother absence, abandonment, or persecutory psychic assault the intolerable absence is heightened. This heightened absence, and the scenario of abandonment are dramatically depicted in the woman's work. The traumatized woman artist depicts a pseudo-masculine figure who is hostile to (or indifferent to) the emotional needs of the women. Meanwhile, the woman is still crying out for mother's love, while she becomes tantalized by the father as her oedipal erotic energies flow. The woman becomes tantalized by the primal male in her life despite her still being arrested in a place of oral cravings for the mother. Then her oral cravings for a concrete mother become compounded by diffuse oedipal stage energies. These energies cannot yet become a focused passion, since passion requires a differentiated view of the father, and of any father figure. However, this is only possible for an oedipal stage woman, who has internalized a good-enough mothering environment. Only the oedipal stage woman can long for a human sized male figure, as opposed to a God, with romantic desire. Instead of romantic longings in the preoedipally arrested woman, there is primal hunger for the idealized other, who at first appears as a God figure, as mother once did for the infant.

The *demon lover complex* woman has never gone past the symbiotic stage idealization of seeing the other as God. This preoedipally arrested woman also projects the power of her own raw, and unneutralized, sexual and aggressive instincts onto the masculinized God Figure. Consequently, cut off from her core psychic self, she continually converts her artistic work (her *internal world* vision) from the craved God into the *terrorizing demon lover villain*, who she submits to, in order to appease her God, so that he will not leave her! Yet, in the end of each cycle of the *demon lover complex* (as it plays itself out in her work), her God/demon does leave her. Then, having submitted to the point of giving up all her power and agency to him, she has to face her own death – through illness, or suicide, or deterioration.

Whereas male artists with female muses seem to sustain their female muses as muses who inspire them through remaining spiritual forces, that are also extensions of the male identity (e.g., Edgar Allan Poe; Auguste Rodin); in the case of the women artists who are preoedipally arrested, the Muse figure annihilates the woman's voice and identity, and he forces her submission to his will, or else he merely leaves her to die without his inspiration. Submission to masculine sadism is the artistic fantasies of women artist can be ecstatic as well as tormenting, as seen in the "Daddy" poem of Sylvia Plath, but it always precedes the woman's self-annihilation in one form or another, at least psychologically, and often physically, and somatically as well.

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Then there are the women artists who have had successful internalization of good-enough mothering and being with the child through the separation-individuation period in the second year of life, such as two that I have written about in my books: Suzanne Farrell of the New York City Ballet in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Charlotte Bronte in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These women may idealize men who have become father figures at the oedipal level, but they are also able to separate from them. They are able to mourn primal losses that only extend back to the oedipal period, when the father is truly a differentiated male figure of romance and desire, due to the oedipal level of development. These oedipal women have enough psychic structure from adequate preoedipal development to mourn losses (depressive position), rather than to continually repeat primal preoedipal losses, losses of the basic maternal environment that can't be mourned, while they repeat the primal trauma in their creative work. These women can have relationships in the world, and with men, and they show this in their work. These women are not stuck in the pathological mourning state of repeating trauma, rather than mourning loss. So they do not exhibit a *demon lover complex* in their life or work, although they often have *demon lover* themes in their work that can get resolved as they mourn in their work and in their life. By contrast, those with the *demon lover complex* are unable to mourn in their work, and they are doomed to be possessed, controlled, and abandoned by their *demon lover figures* on a continuing basis, until they annihilate themselves altogether by suicide or sickness: as seen in my studies of the full life and work of such women artists as Ann Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Edith Sitwell, Katherine Mansfield, Diane Arbus, Emily Bronte, Emily Dickinson, and Camille Claudel.

***Two Sisters: The Two Different Developmental Levels in the Same Family:  
Demon Lover Compulsion vs. Demon Lover Themes: Emily Bronte vs. Charlotte Bronte***

To understand the contrast between the dark side of creativity seen in the preoedipally traumatized woman artist, who exhibits creative compulsion, as well as an addiction to a *demon lover figure* within her *internal world* – vs. the oedipal level woman, who has creative desire and the capacity to mourn – we can look at the Bronte sisters. Emily Bronte was disrupted in her early development during the critical separation-individuation period, when adequate internalization of a good enough transitional stage mother is necessary for self integration. She was only two years old when her mother got ill with cancer; and was only three when her mother died. Her older sister Charlotte, on the other hand, was five when her mother died. Charlotte was already in the oedipal stage. Consequently, her literature and her life can be seen to evidence her developmental maturation, we can see (as shown in the

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study of the two sisters in *The Compulsion to Create...*) we can see that Charlotte was dealing with differentiated father disillusionment, which is based on her having already internalized a good-enough maternal holding environment and maternal object relationship. Particularly, in her last book, *Villette*, which I devote a full chapter to in *The Compulsion to Create*, we see full whole object and differentiated male and female characters in the alter ego heroine Lucy Snowe and her father figure subject of her romantic desire (analogous with creative desire). Charlotte's father figure in *Villette*: is based on a professor in the school in Brussels that she attended to learn to become a teacher. We also see the author actively mourning object loss through her alter ego heroine, Lucy Snowe. We see the alter ego heroine, along with the author who is creating her, and mourning with her, emerge successfully from grief and loss, related to one romantic male character, Graham. This then allows for relationship, mutuality, and assertive aggression and agency, as well as conflict resolution, in relation to another male character, the professor who was at first a chauvinistic father figure. Charlotte Brontë's oedipal stage whole object loss can be mourned because of the prior preoedipal internalization of a good enough mother/self relationship during the transitional stage of separation-individuation.

Thus the profound sadness of grief is evident in her book *Villette*, along with a character driven story, where authentic character development occurs. This character development reaches a point of intimacy, which is achieved through the capacity for mutuality evolving in her male and female characters. Instead of plot driven novel, with chances of fortune determining the fate of the alter ego heroine (which we saw in Charlotte Brontë's more famous novel, *Jane Eyre*), in *Villette*, we see organic character development determining the evolution and resolution of the plot. We also see how the author's capacity to process the grief of loss and memory in the mourning process allows for the renewal of the capacity for sustained love and object relationship. Such resolution occurs after acute and poignant disappointment in romantic love, with its oedipal stage origins and derivatives. (That doesn't mean there's an elegant ending, where the characters stay together, and live happily ever after, but they have transformed one another.)

In the writings of Charlotte's younger sister, Emily Brontë, we see the opposite of this. We see poetry in which a part object God-muse-demon forces the submission of the female poet. Then the female poet loses her voice. Finally, she is seen in a tomb at the end of the poem. Also, in Emily Brontë's one novel, *Wuthering Heights*, we see two halves of the author, one in a devalued feminine form of the victim Catherine, and the other in the manic erotic sadistic form of the pseudo masculine Heathcliff, kill each other off. Instead of character development and organic plot development through

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the evolution of two independent male and female characters, we see a female devoid of instinct (the Victorian false self ideal). Devoid of the energy and vitality of her instincts, the author's female alter ego is easily overwhelmed by the impact of the oral and anal sadistic male character (part object character), to the point of fainting and dying (footnote: this is not the romanticized Hollywood version with Lawrence Olivier, where a much more primitive tale, as written in the novel by Emily Bronte is falsely transformed into a an oedipal romance). Heathcliff's manic erotic intensity, his overwhelming instinct energy (sadism), can't be contained. He erupts with the split off aggression and lust of the female author, and her alter ego female character (Kavaler-Adler, 2013, pp. 185-210). He is a tornado of unmodified and un-integrated energies that bowls Catherine over. Catherine's only way of escaping her marriage to another is to faint, get ill, and die. Then Heathcliff, unable to grieve a loss, dies and joins Catherine's spirit. Heathcliff and Catherine kill each other off on earth, rather than evolving into emotional contact, communication, relationship, and mutuality, as Charlotte Bronte's whole-object characters in *Villette* are able to do (Kavaler-Adler, 2013, pp.115-131). The primal preoedipal trauma of unbearable, and unsymbolized, object loss is repeated.

***Living in Their Internal World and Living in Their Creative Work: Creative Compulsion versus Creative Desire: Tremendous Productivity Followed by Death***

Those who have the *compulsion to create* are those who also manifest the 'demon lover complex,' as contrasted with the *demon lover theme* in their creative work. These are the women artists and writers who feel compelled to create on a continuing basis, while their life in the world either dissipates altogether, or takes a secondary position to the life they live affectively and symbolically in their creative work. Rather than creative desire that motivates a free creative expression, while still living a full life in the external world, these women artists and writers tend to live within their *internal world* on a perpetual basis. Without the free organic flow of life lived alternatively in the external world of love, intimacy and relationship, and in the *internal world* through the creative expression of their own personal voice, as would be the case in those with the "love-creativity dialectic" that I have described in *The Creative Mystique...*, these women go back inside on a perpetual basis, exploiting their internal resources, without restoring them through the nurturance of interpersonal relationships. This repetition of a disrupted relationship in their early preoedipal life finds expression in their work, but also gets expressed in external symptoms such as Emily Dickinson's increasing withdrawal from the world. Dickinson's withdrawal into a state of seclusion eventually led to some of her more brilliant poetic

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writings, but also brought her to the edge of schizoid fragmentation and possible psychosis. Other examples are: Edith Sitwell's withdrawal into alcoholism at the end of her life, with a cessation of her performance art, Camille Claudel's ritualistic smashing of her sculptures followed by a suicide attempt that ended with incarceration in a Parisian Insane Asylum for the last 30 years of her life. Also, there is the case of Katherine Mansfield who refused to enter a sanatorium, to treat life-threatening tuberculosis, due to her compulsion to write. Four years after her refusal to enter a sanatorium, she died, just as was predicted by her doctors. And then, there is the case of Virginia Woolf's final suicide after she ceased writing due to many interacting factors during World War II. Emily Bronte became ill and died when her spiritual phantom muse "abandoned her" (biographer's phrase), so that the muse turned demonic, as he did in her one novel of "Wuthering Heights, as well as in her poetry. Then there is the case of Ann Sexton's final suicidal death, after she left her husband, who she had betrayed a thousand times, the husband whose constancy had held her together. She was going to live for her art, where her *demon lover* resided, without her external husband, but the breakdown of such a critical (sadomasochistic) relationship prevented her from writing any of the eloquent body based poetry that she had managed to prolifically exude before, when married to the man who she ultimately demonized, without the containment and nurturance of the external relationship, Anne Sexton saw no choice but death (Kavaler-Adler, 2014). Prior, her escape had always been into her *internal world*, and into her creative work. A similar scenario is seen in the study of Diane Arbus (Kavaler-Adler, 2014). The loss of her husband that couldn't be mourned devastated the authentic self that strived to live through her subjective *internal world* self, which she projected out onto her photographic subjects.

### ***Edith Sitwell and Emily Dickinson: The Failed Development of the Capacity to Mourn***

The failure to mourn is related to the failure to internalize a good enough maternal holding environment in the first three years of life. Only with more love than hate can one mourn, as opposed to a pathological mourning state, in which one clings addictively to a bad object, or to an eroticized bad object in the form of a *demon lover figure*. Only with a good enough holding environment, as well as relatedness with the mother of separation, can the capacity to love develop, and with it, the capacity to mourn loss of loved objects. The losses extend back to mourning of the primal love objects, and to the core primal maternal love object. Mourning involves connection, and then tolerating loss, but also self-reflective experience of the meaning and memories of the lost love objects.

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When I speak of the “dark side of creativity,” I am speaking about those entrapped in either in compulsions to create, without the capacity to love external others; or about those who are blocked by repression – which may also be accompanied by dissociative mechanisms – so that they experience writing/creative blocks, rather than creative compulsions. Those with creative compulsion, or the compulsion to create, demonstrate a failure to mourn within their creative work (and life), and due to the compulsion to keep creating they manifest character defenses, in the form of schizoid and manic mechanisms. The defense mechanisms produce work that loses authentic intensity, but which allow them to keep producing creative products. The two woman artists I will refer to as examples of this, are two poets, Emily Dickinson and Edith Sitwell. I have in-depth studies of both these women artists in my book *The Compulsion to Create: Women Writers and Their Demon Lovers*.

In the case of Emily Dickinson we have a woman who withdrew from the world, after attending one year of college at Mt. Holyoke College. She was the child of schizoid parents, and of a mother whose schizoid personality was exacerbated by several primal losses in her family, just before Emily was born. So Emily Dickinson, even more than her sister and brother, was born into the arms of a woman who was in a severe pathological mourning state, not having been able to mourn the deaths in her family. Her mother avoided eye contact, as her poetry implies in its blank spaces with dashes, in between any connecting worlds. Emily’s father became the object of her longings, despite her traumatically frustrating need for a mother figure and for an internalized holding environment. Emily Dickinson She could not bear to leave her father and his house, which she lived until the day she died. Since her father had a position as an attorney, and had some advisory position to Mt. Holyoke College, Emily did try attending classes there, for about a year. However, her compulsion to return to her father took over, and she managed to become sick enough to excuse herself from going back to college. After only one year of college, Emily was a young woman when she withdrew from the world. As the years passed, she increased her degrees of seclusion, until she never would leave her house, nor even more extremely her bedroom. She became an elderly recluse, following the loss of the father through death, who lived on in her psyche and poetry as a *Muse/God demon lover figure*. Her father came to her in her poetry as “the metallic God who drilled his welcome in” (see Kavaler-Adler, 2013, p. 214), or as the giant God who cast “one imperial thunderbolt that scalped my naked soul”

The Jungian Monick (1987, p. 123) speaks of the phallus-animus that empowered Dickinson in her fertile poetry, and which I see symbolized in Dickinson's dream of a king that she had to dream the night before feeling fertile with poetry. However, when the phallus power is turned against her, the

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omnipotent God father casts “one imperial thunderbolt that scalped my naked soul” (see Kavaler-Adler, 2013). Poetry became the transitional world expression of Emily’s *internal world*. She began to live in the creative process, and never left it. Gilbert and Gubar (1984), the feminist authors of the book *Mad Woman in the Attic*, cite William Blake's term “the omnipotent and omnipresent nobodaddy” to highlight the Dickinson’s view of herself as “nobody” (one of her poems) in the face of the omnipotent father/God (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984, p. 587). Oedipal and preoedipal levels are combined in the merger with the God-Daddy, and “endeavor excitement” (Tessman 1982, p.225) in the little girl who identifies with a successful father turns into artistic babies, but the preoedipal trauma turns the poet impotent in the face of a father God, since she can't fully own her power as separate. She only writes poetry when fused with the father, and the identification is primitive and often annihilating.

As Emily aged without the nurturance of relationships in the outer world, which was harshly compounded as her mother and then her father died, living in the creative process became the alabaster, cold, womb tomb, she wrote of, where she may have relived the coldness of her mother’s womb. In the cold womb of her father’s house, the female poet spoke of her mother as an absent presence, and of her father as a distant and daunting idealized figure of “awe.” The *demon lover* within her *internal world* -- enhanced by the patriarchy in her society, could not support her needs for a real life object connection. This was especially true as he father died, and as she failed to accept the one offer she had of marriage, from a father figure who she loved, someone who had been a close friend of her father’s. In refusing the one opportunity she had to leave her father’s house, she wrote in her poetry that “NO” was the “most exciting word in the English language,” and she wrote that “renunciation is a piercing virtue” (Kavaler-Adler, 2013, p. 27; Sewall, 1974; Cody, 1971). She stayed in her father’s home, and withdrew beyond the garden and downstairs interior life to her tiny bedroom above, from where she lowered a tray with food for her young nephew and his friends, who played in the garden. She was a strange recluse in the small Massachusetts town of Amherst. Yet even before her mother and father died, she was driven mad by her isolation. She began to keep suicidal thoughts harbored in the silence of her breast as she went about her daily chores:

I tie my hat - I crease my shawl -  
Life's little duties do – precisely...  
(poem #443, Johnson 1960, *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*)

Nevertheless, she could not contain it all. Eventually, she erupted in mind-splitting internal experience, pivoting off an extreme of depersonalization. It was only through her defining what was

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erupting within her, through the words in her poetry, that she seemed to have forestalled an external psychotic demonstration of an internal psychic implosion. Some of Emily Dickinson's most tortured poetry emerged, as she felt herself fragmenting around a primal infant or toddler split in her psyche. She wrote: "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" and felt her mind falling and splitting, a "cleaving in my mind" (see Kavaler-Adler, 2013, p.245). From an aesthetic perspective this can be seen as Dickinson's most inspired poetry, as she grasped in words, what others could never grasp as they descend into madness. The poetry is profound in its agony and vivid in its portrayal of her *internal world* coming apart, with her brain envisioning as a splitting apart primal self. She writes:

I felt a funeral, in my Brain  
And Mourners to and fro  
Kept treading-treading-till it seemed  
That sense was breaking through -  
And then they all were seated,  
A service like a Drum -  
Kept beating - beating - till I thought  
My mind was going numb...  
And space began to toll...  
(poem #280, c. 1861; in Johnson, 1960, *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*)

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However, Dickinson would never return to such brilliance. Her poetic art would begin to fail her now, as she suffered psychic decline. This decline came following evocative *internal world* chaos and conflict inevitable came. Dickinson's psyche needed to protect itself from self annihilation. To psychically survive, Dickinson seems to have mentally resorted to closing off her internal affect and imagery life, in the manner of a massive schizoid character defense. Then she kept her habit of poetry, but its essence was never the same. Her poetry became quaint, tame, and picturesque. She wrote of a realistic vision of a bird in the outside world. She lost the imagery of the *internal world* evolving into agonized depiction, and lost even the artistry of her earlier nature poetry (Kavaler-Adler, 2013, p. 268).

So in addition to withdrawing mentally, as she withdrew from the world to the extreme of an odd and elderly recluse existence, she closed off the alive affect life of infantile experience emerging in states of terror, splitting, projection, and fragmentation that had colored the drama of poetry. Part of her defensive way of closing off was to close off any remnants of a fragile, vulnerable, but still infantile feminine self. Dickinson became increasingly identified with the armored masculine features than bound her to her father and brother. She then identified with a pseudo-masculine toughness in the image of a gun. Her rage spoke from the phallic gun image as she declared "My Life Is a Loaded Gun" (Kavaler-

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Adler, 2013, p. 255). But then the poet suffers the despair of losing, altogether, her inner awareness of feminine potential. She even lost the devalued feminine metaphorical image container of the “Daisy” flower that she had written from earlier (Kavaler-Adler, 2013). Now she became identified with the phallic, and her pseudo masculine being speaks of its imprisonment. She writes in a cynical despair, at the end of the poem of being a “loaded gun”: “I can kill but I cannot die” (Kavaler-Adler, 2013, p. 255). In other words, she could kill with phallic gun energy, but she couldn’t surrender. She writes of images of masculine phallic orgasms, as the mountains erupt, but her feminine side is dead, and so she cannot have feminine surrender. She has lost her vulnerability, and as lost her potential capacity for female orgasm (Kavaler-Adler 2013, pp. 254-259).

### ***Edith Sitwell: The British Poet and Performance Artist***

In *The Compulsion to Create: Women Writers and Their Demon Lovers*, I illustrate how Edith Sitwell, this renowned British female artist, became unable to write poetry, when her psyche was calling for her to enter a developmental mourning process. To enter this depressive position level psychological process, she would have to confront her helpless and traumatized child self. She would also have to experience the painful primal abandonment depression affect states, which can evolve developmentally into mournful grief affect. In the beginning Sitwell used satire and sarcasm to defend against a haunting *internal world* that harbored devastating infant and childhood trauma. She had buffoon images of her father, who was easier to represent as a person, or part object caricature person, than her mother (Kavaler-Adler, 2013, p. 279). Her mother remained in the dissociated self and object fragments, which came to her in sadomasochistic dramas in her poetry. However, as she reached more for her true self the internal devastation became apparent. In a poem called “Still Falls the Rain,” she has continuous chorus of that which I would define as the uncried tears and longings of a pathological mourning state. After each stanza in which she has demon like images in flat two dimensional victim/villain dramas, with no third (father or interpreting subject for symbolism), or third dimension (the *demon lover complex*), she has the poignant dark phrase “Still Falls the Rain!” (cited in Salter and Harper, 1976, p. 276). In this poem, the rain of un-cried tears will be perpetuated forever, because the developmental mourning process can never begin, due to unresolved preoedipal psychic arrest from primal trauma.

Then in two later poems we see how a capacity to mourn fails, even as the need to mourn pressures her psyche. The need to mourn also darkens the contents of a poetry that is beginning to truly depict an authentic *internal world*. In a poem on a Greek myth of a female character, Sitwell reaches a

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moment where she uses the word “mourning” but she cannot continue in the developmental direction of mourning (or of Melanie Klein’s “depressive position”). The poet says the word “mourning” because she is compelled developmentally to go in the direction of mourning, but she cannot follow through because she does not have the psychic structure of a separate internal processing, as well as reflecting *self* that would normally meditate on a subjective experiencing *self*. The potential subjective self talk is arrested, because she cannot contain and tolerate the affects of grief and loss. These potential affects are continually attenuated by cold rage from a primal preoedipal level, where the original lack of maternal nurturance exists, along with the bad object attachments that transpired internally from primal maternal abuse and neglect.

Then, in a poem about Skid Row derelicts in Los Angeles, California, Sitwell begins to find an external symbolic image to contain the horrible deprivation, emaciation, and evisceration of her internal child self. She writes:

What is that whimpering like a child  
That this mad ghost beats a drum in the air?  
The heart of Sal  
That once was a girl  
And now is a Calico thing to loll  
Over the easy steps of the slum  
Waiting for something dead to come...  
(as quoted by Salter and Halper, 1981, pp. 188-189)

But the confrontation of the true core self is too much for Sitwell. It is following her failure to mourn, when she says the word “mourning” in her poetry; it is following her erupting *internal world* trauma, relived through the image of skid row derelicts (which evidences projection into an external container of something that is too horrifying to confront), that Edith Sitwell succumbs to a writing block. She succumbs to a writing block, although she is a creature of creative compulsion, always driven to express her undeveloped psychic self in writing. For ten years she fails to write a word of poetry, despite poetry being the only avenue for the expression of a true self since her childhood. For ten years, her poetic voice ceases, and she can only write prose. She writes two biographies that have been noted to be rather underdeveloped, suffering from being echoes of her own unconscious internal life. She writes of the first Queen Elizabeth, and she writes of August Pope.

Then she has a literary triumph that seems to promise a return of her poetic gifts, but the return to poetry also expresses a failure in authentic self-expression. She returns to poetry as the famed War Time poet, but she uses a new mode of character defense to shield her from the true internal self experience of

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agonized childhood dependency in the face of traumatic mothering and parenting. Now, instead of satire and sarcasm, which are disguised manic defense modes of contempt according to Melanie Klein's depressive position defenses against guilt and loss, she uses an overt mode of manic defense. She places herself above all the characters in her poetry (part object two dimensional characters). She begins to portray herself as a Prophet, with a capital P. She as the Prophet narrates the poem that depicts the villain/victim dramas of her pseudo masculine and devalued female counterparts. For example, she writes in "The Song of the Cold," with its *demon lover theme*:

The naked Knight in the coat of mail  
Shrieked like a bird that flies through the leaves  
The dark bird proud as the Prince of Air-  
I am the world's last love...  
Beware-  
Young girls, you press your lips to lips  
That are already cold  
(cited in Salter and Harper, 1976, p. 239)

Sitwell places herself above two part object characters that are both elements of her *internal world* psyche. One part object is the child self, the anguished dependent child perceived as female. The other part object is the sadistic autocratic internal parent, perceived with the manic erotic intensity of the pseudo- masculine, as also seen in Emily Bronte's Heathcliff character of *Wuthering Heights*. By doing so Sitwell avoids engagement with the parent/child trauma that lives within her. This is how the female poet psychically survives, and this is how she continues to create. However, she does so at the expense of authentic subjective self-expression. Sitwell's subjective experience is seen from the outside, and from above, in the mode of warding off manic defense. Her own psychological growth does not evolve in her creative work. Yet she can give the form and words of poetry to a public that already knows of her as a performance artist. The childhood situation within her *internal world* is never resolved, and her creative work has diminishing returns, just as in the case of Emily Dickinson. As she then ages, Sitwell despair echoes the depiction of the aging narcissist that Kernberg (1975) has described in his classic book on *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*. In addition to my individual studies on Edith Sitwell and Virginia Woolf in my two books on well-known women writers and artists, I have a former journal article on "The Aging Decline of Virginia Woolf and Edith Sitwell" published in the journal of *Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy* (Kavaler-Adler, 1992). The decline that comes with aging in narcissistic characters is based on despair, when the narcissistic gratifications in the world diminish, and yet they are incapable of feeling the "generativity" (Erikson, 1950) towards the growth and success of

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others. Narcissistic characters fail to live vicariously through those coming up the ladder to success and achievement in the world. Once more their failing relationships leave them bereft of self objects and self object mirroring as the applause of the world lessens. For Edith Sitwell, her psychological decline, which we can see here as related to unresolved primal trauma psychic arrest, becomes manifest in a mild form of alcoholism, accompanied by a schizoid withdrawal from the world (reflective of Emily Dickenson's reclusive seclusion). The same withdrawal is seen in Emily Bronte. As the narcissistic defenses, with their manic forms, diminish in effect, the core schizoid self (and its schizoid and paranoid dynamics) become more overt in external life. Edith Sitwell displays the paranoia that Camille Claudel shows in her decline. She also shows similar schizoid mechanisms of withdrawal when the manic defenses in her later creative work fail, as she ceases to do the work. She was reported to have attacked the world at large in a radio interview. During that interview she also succumbed to the paranoid terror of fearing that the whole world hated her. Her internal objects (parents) must have been retaliating.

### ***Submission, Rather than Surrender, to the Muse/Demon Lover God***

What death threat are these women avoiding when they resort to schizoid and manic defenses? As mentioned, Emily Dickinson wrote of the *metallic God* that drilled his welcome in, and the imperial omnipotent God of thunderbolts that scalped her naked soul! She wrote of this along with writing of the treacherous dangers of male and phallic sexual forces and energies (poem ending with a shoe full of pears). She wrote of this while retaliating, with nuance, against the male editor and publisher who condemned her work as spasmodic. She wrote of this along with the Master Letters in which she longed for a far off huge masculine force, while seeing herself as an impotent daisy, the devalued feminine, in the face of an omnipotent patriarchal God. Then there was the gentleman caller who would drive her to the land of death in his coach (Kavaler-Adler, 2013).

Edith Sitwell saw her *demon lover* in her father, who she caricatured. But the deeper fantasies of his malevolence came later in life, when she bypassed sarcasm and satire, and began to write of her unconscious nightmare fantasy images. She then wrote of the *black atom bomb mushroom* cloud as the image of patriarchal manhood. The image is of a phallus upside down; a phallus that does not impregnate a womb to spawn live babies, but instead impregnates the world with fatal radiation, killing all in its range, reflecting the dissociated rage of the poet. (Kavaler-Adler, 2013)

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Emily Bronte longed for the far off omnipotent Muse/God, who ended up transforming into her *demon lover*. At first, she cried out in primal infant longing, “my outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels” (Kavaler-Adler, 2013, p. 178). Yet when her pseudo masculine God approaches from the vast cold regions of snow beyond, he is quick to subjugate, jail, and devastate her in the poem “Silent in the House, all are laid to sleep,” (# 190; published by Hatfield, 1941; Bronte, E. *Complete Poems*). As the alter ego devalued feminine figure submits to the patriarchal sadistic God, rather than providing the primal maternal nurturance she longed for, the female author of the poem loses her voice. In the last stanza of the poem there is the image of a tombstone. The author and her alter ego heroine have submitted to the point of death, to the Muse God who inevitably turns demonic as he is both eroticized and offered all the sexual and aggressive power of the woman, who due to early trauma (loss of the mother at two) cannot contain her own instincts. The whole scenario is repeated in Emily Bronte’s one and only novel, “Wuthering Heights,” with Catherine and Heathcliff. One of Emily Bronte’s biographers, Gerin (1971), speaks of the woman author giving way to illness and death (from the family disease of tuberculosis), at the exact point when she writes of her masculine muse leaving her. She has poetry of the Nightwind, the masculine force of nature that abandons her (see Kavaler-Adler, 2013, pp. 181-182). She repeats the preoedipal abandonment of her mother through illness and death. Her psyche reflects the repetition of primal trauma in the vicious cycle of the *demon lover complex*. Emily Bronte illustrates borderline and schizoid themes in her work, and schizoid withdrawal in her life.

Her sister Charlotte bypassed Emily developmentally, entering the neurotic depressive position era, as their mother only left Charlotte when she was five, already in the oedipal era. Charlotte’s writings reflect oedipal stage disillusionment. Unlike her sister Emily, who had preoedipal trauma, and who couldn't therefore work her losses through in her creative work, Charlotte is able to mourn and work through losses in her work. She mourns the loss due to oedipal stage disillusionment. .

Anne Sexton speaks of her demon lover as the malignant alcoholic father figure in her poetry. She also shows her *demon lover complex*, which drives her to compulsive expulsion of her internal life through creativity, in images of her long term psychiatrist/lover. She slept with this man for years, all the time paying him after each session, when each session was a sexual escapade, which was for her a *demon lover* attachment enactment, still living in her *internal world* from her childhood with two narcissistic parents. Sexton is protective towards the doctor who betrayed her and sexually exploited her. In fact, she shields him from the threat of an ethics committee, by keeping her love affair in the treatment room secret, even after the initial exposure of the affair to her former therapist, Dr. Orne.

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Sexton protected her abuser, and like any demon lover he abandoned her in the end, repeating her primal abandonment trauma, and leaving her to her ultimate suicidal course. This tale can be seen in an in-depth study in my book, *The Creative Mystique: From Red Shoes Frenzy to Love and Creativity* (Kavaler-Adler, 2014).

### ***The Other Side of the Dark Side of Creativity: Blocks. A Case of Writing Blocks***

On the one side of the dark side of creativity are those artists and writers who try to live in the *internal world* from where the creative process comes from, resulting in a powerful compulsion to create, often accompanied by the demon lover complex. As has been described, this is related to a failure of early maternal bonding and relatedness, during the time when the Self is forming. This failure of mothering results in failure to internalize the “good enough” relations – first with the mother, then – with others. The deprivation and trauma prevent the mourning of primal and early loss, and results in the failure to develop a capacity to mourn for both primary and later losses. The attachment to the bad object takes over, and the attachment can be eroticized as in the *demon lover complex*.

However, on the other side of the spectrum of the dark side of creativity, are those afflicted by blocks to art and writing. Unlike those who keep creating compulsively, even as their relationships in the world break down, are those who are blocked in their creative efforts. In these cases, repression is a major factor in the person’s inhibitions, although dissociation of experience can also take place. This differs from the *compulsion to create addict*, who has inadequate containing repression, and who keeps dissociating from bad object experience in the *internal world*, clinging inwardly to a defensive idealized other, which can be played out externally as well. One part of the person dissociates from the bad object in the *internal world* and the other part of the self clings to the bad object, but sees it as an “exciting” or idealized object. This can be seen in the psyche of Melanie Klein as illustrated in the archived letters, between Melanie Klein and her mother (Phyllis Grosskurth, 1986). However, in those with creative blocks, repression is the primary operation; and regression to the level at which the original repression took place, is a continual feature of psychoanalysis with those with creative blocks.

### ***Resolving Writing Blocks in a Psychoanalytic Case***

I have been seeing a woman in psychoanalytic treatment for 3 years now, who has writing blocks as her main issue. She has been seeing me four times a week for almost two years now, and had been in treatment for a year before for 2 or 3 times a week. What is so striking in working with this woman, who

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I will call Renee, is that she has a primal trauma that we continuously see interacting with all her later losses and traumas. As we proceed we discover the devastating effects of the primal trauma to be continuously interacting with other levels of agony, which have had to be defended against. Rage emerges in the transference as going on strike against writing, where I interpret that she is acting out her rage as going on strike, screaming without word at times “I won’t produce for you.” But this kind of anal level rage in the transference, which she turns against herself, in both mental and physical ways, not only blocks her and paralyzes her; it is overlaid with an earlier level, in which she is profoundly attached to an absence, or in Bion’s words a “no thing.” And then, we discover the later stages of conscious memory of what she is so anguished and enraged about. We keep discovering more specific subjective experience from all these other ages and times. And all this does open Renee's capacity to write, but every time Renee returns to the repressed trauma and loss, she can lose her ability to remember anything that has come before in the analysis. In Thomas Ogden’s (1986) terms, she loses her ability to be an *historical subject*, as well as to be an *interpreting subject*. Temporarily, words become meaningless. Consequently, Renee rejects me, the analysis, and interpretations that only sound like “bullshit” to her. But then, as I interpret what triggered the new phase of the writing block, and her affects open along with more crystallized memories, in which she now feels the past, rather than just reporting it, Renee comes alive again. Once more, she begins to use words creatively again. She begins to take in my words, and to understand the symbolic meaning of the words in interpretations once again. Further, she begins to be able to build on the analyst’s interpretations. Following this, Renee is also able to write short stories again, and short story writing is the passion that Renee claims to be the only thing that can make her life meaningful before she dies.

When Renee is blocked, she shouts in her negative transference rage: “You don’t understand the frustration. I am going to die without being able to do the one thing in the world I want to do more than anything! This bullshit takes forever and I still can’t write.” In truth, she has written many short stories since she entered analysis, but all this is wiped out for her as she once again feels like she can’t access feelings, and make words meaningful, because neurotic repression has taken over. However, Renee’s borderline regression compounds this. At such times Renee can’t even remember what came before she became blocked in each new moment of blocking. She has blocked her capacity for experiencing time, and consequently time stands still. Time is frozen, and words no longer have meaning or impact. Nonetheless, as we work through another phase of memories, and of a process of integration of her memories, with each other, and with pre memory trauma, I face her transference rage. This is an old

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childhood rage that Renee had formerly turned against herself, until her muscles become paralyzed. This opens a new phase of reparation, and Renee begins to write again. She unblocks, and opens to new conscious memories, as her feelings are felt in the present through the object connection with the analyst, and through her transference projections. With each phase of conscious resolution of blocked memory, and with each phase of anger and sadness in the mourning process, Renee writes another short story.

### *Attaching to an Absence or “No Thing” (shades of Emily Dickinson)*

Renee’s earliest experience of trauma seems to reach back to a primal stage in her life, which she cannot remember, because she had no conceptual memory at that time. Yet her unconscious remembers within her body, as well as in later fantasies that evolved around the subjective experience of devastating loss. At one year and nine months old, Renee’s mother left for a week to go to a hospital to give birth to her younger brother. Now this is a common enough occurrence. Yet, for Renee her mother’s absence was at a critical time in her development; when she would have needed to image her mother when her mother wasn’t physically present (Mahler, 1971; Kavaler-Adler 2014). She would have needed to be able to keep her mother alive in her mind until her mother actually returned. However, with the mother’s profound absence she would not have been capable of imaging her mother in her mind to keep her psychologically alive for her. Renee enacted this in her analysis as the wiping out of time, memory and the meaning of words. Such defensive response also enacts the reoccurrence of developmental arrest, due to Renee being traumatically overwhelmed with a lifetime of rage. Yet there is a fantasy that is born in the transitional space of the patient and the analyst, a fantasy image that begins to define that which was only an absence, a “no thing.” Renee begins to see herself as the sole survivor after a Holocaust. She is all alone. There is nobody else there, which she begins to interpret as nobody else is alive. Grasping this image is the beginning of not being “all in it,” all in the infinite psychic void. She is enough outside of it now to see herself all alone in the world. Yet as she relives this void experience, this “no thing” experience becomes modified. Formerly, this void experience operated as an encapsulated and dissociated state. Yet, in the void itself is the attachment to the “no thing” or to what the poet Emily Dickinson has called “the abyss,” “the absent presence,” the “alabaster tomb,” etc. (Kavaler-Adler, 2013). Why should Renee have to keep returning to this “all alone in the world after a Holocaust” experience? From Fairbairn’s perspective, she is attached to the “bad object” mother who was not there at this time, beyond what her infant mind could comprehend. From Bion’s perspective she was attached

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to the “no thing” absent mother. The mother herself was experienced through the absence of her, as well as through the child’s need to cling to the only mother that was there, at the pain of psychic death. Consequently, the absent mother actually had become one part object mother inside of her.

So Renee keeps returning to the mother again and again. In the more Kleinian experience, before she could feel a subjective sense of self, I was the transference part object cold ice breast. Renee would say to me: “You’re as cold as ice.” Other times she would say I was trying or was now revealing compassion in myself, but for a long time, I was just “cold as ice.” Yet Renee couldn’t leave. She was attached to the hope of psychoanalysis helping her, as well as being unconsciously attached to the transference grandmother part of me. Also, part of her remembered something meaningful had happened with me, as time went on. But during the return to the “no thing” she would only experience me as the cold ice breast that was not doing anything to help in her state of helplessness. And she would tell me that my words were all “blah blah blah,” meaningless impotent things, annoying her, enraging her, showing her how useless I was to her. Yet she was attached to me as “no thing,” or to “ice breast” that was perceived as unwilling to reach out a hand and rescue her from an unbearable state. This is what people fear about analysis – reliving the unbearable states that never had words or meaning to contain them. These states have actually been in the present all along, just repressed, with dissociated body and mind reactions (not the dissociation of whole parts of her ego and psyche as in the borderline, and other character disorders). Fairbairn would call it the return of the repressed, would see it as the real bad objects from infancy coming out into consciousness, causing terror. Her rage had a terror too that we spoke about. However, when we got to her wanting to knife me, choke me, chop up, and dismember me, she began to feel the power of her dissociated aggression, and she began to feel some power. Consequently, she did not have to keep clinging, at least at that moment, to an absence or “no thing” or “ice breast.” Then I could feel with her. Renee would then let me come alive again.

### ***Other Memories, Other Ages, Other Losses***

Then she was seven years old. The scenario came to life, as the blocked affects of grief pressured her into defensive opposition again. Going on strike against her inner life always sabotaged her. But this was what was built into her psyche, with its unconscious defense that walled her off from her repressed feelings, impulses, bad objects, and memories.

As we tuned into her internal experience, Renee began to visualize the bricks in the wall inside her mind. Over time the bricks softened into wood, and more flexible yielding material. But at first the

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wall had bricks that were dense with tension of solid resistance, which often manifested in her muscles as she got headaches, constipation, and helpless paralysis, with the buildup of inner affect into what she described as “funk.” Renee also agreed when I called it shit. It was a shitty feeling to feel blocked off and emotionally constipated, whether or not she became physically constipated. But she built in each block, although she couldn’t access this aggression consciously, until her rage towards me in the transference, and towards her mother in her *internal world*, opened into consciousness. She only felt like the helpless victim who had no power.

The absent, “no thing,” was the internal mother of her second year of life. Such a “no thing” mother transformed into the actively abandoning mother in a memory from seven years old. She lived this abandonment out with me when she accused me of sitting back, while she was frustrated beyond endurance, fearing her life would end before she could write. Of course, she was forgetting she had been writing--several short stories that had won praise, and interest, even if not acceptance from publishers. In her reliving of that repressed, which was always enacting its drama in her *internal world*, she threatened to quit analysis. She cancelled sessions with her long term writing coach, rather than use the sessions to discuss her undeveloped thoughts, and to get support. She just said “I have nothing to say. I’m not writing.”

Renee demanded help, but also rejected the kind of questions I offered as help in a typical scenario of anal type of resistance, rather than relatedness. She was on strike! Unconsciously, she enacted “I will not produce for you!,” and I referred to her toilet training that had overlapped the era of her mother’s initial abandonment, when she was one year nine month old. But under the passive resistant aggression, was the vulnerable child who felt she had lost her mother for good. And although the earliest level was from a preverbal era, when she didn’t not have words and concepts to remember, the later levels of reliving the abandonment were more ready to become conscious as conceptualized and felt memories, rather than as hysterical body conversions into her muscles.

So we entered the land of her seven year old agony together! I had accepted her hatred, and so she began to speak to me. She remembered crying and crying and crying, on one poignant night, when her mother was going to leave her with a baby sitter to go out to dinner with friends. Her mother and father, and another couple who she was taught to call Uncle and Aunt, were all going out to dine together. They were eager for sharing their adult company for an evening. But Renee was bereft beyond relief! Her crying was exhaustive and mind annihilating. She could not stop. The unconscious fears of drowning in her tears must have threatened to swallow her up. She choked. She felt like she couldn’t

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breathe. She did not know or conceptualize her agony at the time, but she had an actual memory of the scene, which testifies to her mind operating at a higher conceptual and visual level than at one year nine months. Renee just knew her mother was leaving. She desperately wanted to stop her from going. Renee conjectures that her mother may have tried to soothe and reassure her for a while, but ultimately her “Uncle Paul” demanded that they finally exit, to go for dinner. When Renee’s mother turned and agreed to leave, Renee felt something else, besides endless grief, from object loss. She felt that her mother always rejected her to cooperate with someone else. She felt that her so-called Uncle was more important to her mother than she was. She relived this intense feeling state on the couch with me.

So, in crying again, she remembered the feeling of sobbing so much and so profusely, for so long, that she thought she would die. But what came to her now was that she could travel through the sense of self-annihilating absence of the other, to a higher level of conceptualized feeling of rejection. It was a shitty feeling, as well as a very familiar one, but it was not one of self-annihilation. It was feeling of humiliation. She had felt she was as unimportant to her mother – in the memory (at seven) – as a piece of shit. She was the discarded turd. She didn’t have worth. She was disposable. But she still existed as a person. And she was not just alone after a Holocaust. She was now aware of being on the outside, excluded, so she was not all in it. It was not just blackness and death that triggered a sense of her dissolving and losing all shape. She now had shape. But she was shit. Shit has shape, but it also smells and drives people away. Shit has no self agency in it.

Through re-living her repressed agony of abandonment mixed with rejection, Renee began to be able to write about her rage. She also wrote a story about her anger at me, related to my failure to comply in the manner that she thought was (in her words) “only human,” when she requested I lend her an umbrella. At first, blocked by guilt, relating back to her internal mother’s offense at her speaking critically about her, and by guilt about moving beyond her mother in creative work, she was able to move forward into her tale that mocked me as the anonymous analyst in the story. She turned rage and hatred towards me, with all its transferenceal overtones, into creative writing. Renee began to transform anger into humor, as well as into love and forgiveness. This was all part of her developmental mourning process.

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***Forward and Back in the Time of the Unconscious Mind:  
Increasingly Emerging Out of Repression***

As I said, there were times when time was totally annihilated, and Renee lost her ability to be a *historical subject* (Ogden, 1986). Then she just felt like I was the withholding ice breast, or the inadequate shit breast. Then she was left in the lurch, in a No Exit scenario, which could only lead to death in her mind. In Kleinian terms, Renee had regressed back to the *paranoid-schizoid position*, where there was only the thing in itself, with no symbolic representation of her sensory and mental phenomena. I wasn't a transference mother, grandmother, or father. I was just an unyielding thing that wouldn't give to her that which she desperately needed in this negative eternal now moment, where there was "No Exit" in Sartre's words. There was "No Exit" from murderous starvation that she could only call then "frustration." Only later, as Renee came out of this state, after the trigger to her despair was interpreted (which at this time was related to envy of a same age colleague who had published her writing, and made a career teaching it) – could she describe her experience as self-annihilation at the hands of a cold ice therapist, who was rejecting her by being like a breast that withholds milk. Renee could only find such descriptive words when she returned to a depressive position state of mind, where words had meaning. Only then was the sense of linear time restored. When time was restored she would thank me, because she then could remember what happened between us and in her mind. Her gratitude was evidence of a depressive position ability to recall the process and gains of her treatment, and to see me restored to a whole person picture of being an experienced analyst who could help her. I was no longer a static part object unyielding breast, or a limp shitty impotent breast that had nothing to offer her. And now her words could flow in an articulate flow, as she was connected to her inner feeling life again. Her unconscious blocking would return, however.

Another example of this loss of time and process occurred when Renee's unconscious defenses were blocking her from writing again. In addition, she felt like she was uncoordinated in her body and dreaded going to swimming lessons at her health club. She again felt analysis was worthless bull shit, as she again felt like shit. When I tried to be of use by reflecting back her enraged view of me and her useless analysis, she told me I was of no help. I only annoyed her by reflecting back her own thoughts and trying to find words to articulate the repressed feelings behind them. She bawked. We struggled. She succeeded at making me feel pretty shitty, as she deflected a lot of her shitty rage affect into me, and I received it through projective identification. But there was also my own shitty feelings prompted by being rejected, and due to my obsessions about how we both could get out of this trap.

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Thus Renee wrote me an email threatening to not come for her next session, which was the last of her four sessions for the week. I wrote back that we had reached that which had triggered this state at the end of the last session. I suggested that it would be meaningful to follow up. She wrote back: “Blah, Blah, Blah, Blah!” I didn’t respond, and she surprised me by appearing the next day. Her first words in the session were an ultimatum threat: “If you don’t have something useful to say to me I’m leaving!” She then added, when I decided not to yet speak: “What did you mean about what we talked about at the end of the last session?” I then said it was interesting that she didn’t remember. I added: “You seem to have wiped out the memory of us speaking of your envy of the writing teacher, who had gone to high school with you, and now had a full career as a fiction author and teacher.” She said that “now” she remembered this. I responded further, saying that she had been triggered into her “funk” state of blockage, and of memory loss, as well as loss of time and meaning, by her envy. I added that it was an envy that she had not been conscious of.

Renee agreed with me. I went on to interpret Renee’s defense process, beyond the content of the last session. I said that she felt like she was just a helpless, passive victim of not remembering something significant at the end of the session. Yet, it seemed to me that she was actively wiping out the meaning that had happened between us because she wanted everything here with me to be shit, so that she could reject it all, and flush it down the toilet, by not coming to a session, or by leaving analysis altogether. I said that I knew that she didn’t experience herself as actively wiping out her memory of a part of the session that had meaning to her (“the negative therapeutic reaction”), but that there was an active part of her that was acting unconsciously to do this. I said that she gets paralyzed, helpless, and blocked, because she does not consciously own this active and very aggressive part of her, a part of her that had a lot of power, which she needed to feel empowered. I also said that I understood that she had been taught as a child to suppress her anger, and that this made her helpless. This made her feel she needed someone to rescue her from the helplessness. I suggested that this was an opportunity to own her anger, and to channel its aggression into an empowered sense of agency, or pro-activity, in common parlance.

Renee began to be interested in what I said, and began to volunteer her associations to what I was saying as I spoke, in the transitional space and time moments between us. We now had some transitional space, rather than being locked in a binary polarization between her view and mine, or between her mind and body, or between her phallic power of initiation and her feminine power of receptivity. We now had transitional space within which Renee could listen and understand the meaning

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of words in my interpretations, and in my relational gestures towards her. My relational gestures (e.g., reflecting back to her point of view) had also been rejected.

So, as I told her that active part had not only rage, but murderous impulses, behind it, Renee was able to declare that she could visualize knifing, choking, shooting, and dismembering someone, and I suggested that this “someone” had been me in the last session, in between that session and this one, and up to a few moments ago. She could see that now. Her ability to visualize returned; the ability that she had lost when her mother went to the hospital at one year nine months. In Margaret Maher’s words she could no longer image her mother, since the mother had been absent for too long. At that tender age she could not sustain an ability to remember her mother, and to know that her mother would return. Thus she had been, in her mind, all alone after a holocaust. She then lost her ability for imagining. As she got older, she would actively stop her ability, not only to image or visualize, but also to find words, and to feel the affects behind words to give them meaning. She had been re-living the early loss of her mother by stopping her own ability to have meaning in words, or to have a sustained sense of time and consequence. She had repeatedly returned to a dissociated state of living in a vacuum.

Now, as Renee is finding words to express her rage in images of murdering, she also awakes from her repression. She begins to feel that the thing that she is most angry about is the death of her grandmother when she was thirteen, and when she was not allowed to go to the funeral and say “good-bye.” From this realization, Renee begins to recall all these wonderful things about her grandmother’s warm mothering capacity. Her grandmother praised and celebrated her when nobody else did. Everyone else saw her as too aggressive as she became a teenager. Everyone else told her to shut up. Her mother threatened her with the guilt provoking emotional blackmail of saying: “You’re giving me a heart attack.” Earlier on, she had been told repeatedly by her mother to just keep quiet and do what her mother said. As she became a teenager she still was not offered any explanation of why her mother was saying what she did. So she was never encouraged to think for herself. Becoming a teenager, Renee was seen as really threatening, as her one year nine month old rage became the assaults of a teenager’s accusations, and searing curses. She was told to keep quiet in stronger ways. Finally, she was sent to a therapist, where she could have someone listen to her. This was the first time she was listened to after her grandmother’s death.

Her grandmother had listened to her, and now she felt the sadness of having lost her. Renee began to feel her grief about her grandmother’s death. She also recalled that her grandmother had stood up for her, when nobody else did, for instance, when she was being emotionally abused by her father.

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Renee began to recall a lot more now. A whole phase of remembering and mourning her grandmother unfolded. She began to imagine that she could write about her feelings, but still worried that she wouldn't find a plot for a story. Yet, I had seen these doubts many times dissolve into a beautifully evolved short story that publishers had respect for, even if the publishers were not ready at that point to accept her work.

We had gone forward to her grandmother's death, and now we went back. She managed to not go into the full funk state now, by being aware of what could lead up to it. So Renee actually sustained the process of going back into rich memories and feelings. Her most difficult feelings were emerging into consciousness, as she remembered rage that had so overwhelmed her in Junior High that she shoved a big desk right into her teacher's body. Her teacher wouldn't stand up for her, when the tough girls in Junior High bullied and belittled her right there in class. She couldn't stand the overwhelming rage anymore. Instead of paralyzing herself, she acted out, and was promptly sent to the guidance counselor's office where she didn't have the capacity to communicate what had just happened. However, now Renee could put it all together. She realized that now she was feeling like the humiliated victim, and was feeling helpless and paralyzed. She began to convert her aggressive feelings into visceral body channels. She gave herself a headache and pain in the neck, as she remembered being treated like she was a pain in the neck. Meanwhile, the tough chicks of Junior High School were inside her *internal world*. Internally, they were telling her that she had big feet and was weird in every way. She projects this at her swim club onto anonymous others. She protests in the session, as if she is now in the room with those girls, who had now come out into our transitional world, from her *internal world*. She says: "And I don't even have big feet." I reflect back my compassion for feeling humiliated, mortified, shamed, and belittled. But I then say "Now imagine you being the girls and you screaming your anger out." She began to get into it. I said both parts of this memory scene are you, just as both parts in a dream are you. You were the bullied victim, but now as you recreate it because you were forced to identify with your abusers, you are also the bullies. You are actively recreating them. "So now own it, and say what you want to say back to them by being in their position. Be the bitch towards the bitches." She begins to do this, and her headache begins to go away.

Renee is seeing that she has a choice to feel her aggressive side now, and to put it in to words, so that it doesn't destroy her or me, or anyone. I tell Renee that she can re-empower herself in this way when she sits down to write too.

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***Countertransference as Bionian Container, Not a Co-creation.  
Bringing the Dark Side of Creativity into the Light***

In sessions with Renee, I feel temporarily transformed into the ice breast, as well as into the shit that have been enduring repressed parts of her *internal world*. Renee becomes icy to me too at times, as she induces within me that feeling of an ice breast, or the feeling of being shit, or garbage. Gradually, she re-owns these parts of her internal world, and for the first time, they can become part of her subjective self.

In my object relations thinking (Kleinian and British), I do not feel comfortable with calling this a “co-creation” because I am not the ice breast, or shit, when I am separate from her. Even if I can feel cold or shitty at times, I have not clinically experienced myself as dumping these subjective feeling states into her. The boundary between me and her is clearer than in full borderline personality cases. Renee may regress to borderline phenomena, or phenomena of the psychic state of the *paranoid-schizoid position*, in Kleinian terms, but she does not have the fundamental psychic structure of a borderline personality. She operates out of a neurotic psychic structure most of the time, and has containment with unconscious repression. Her dissociated states are encapsulated and limited. This is also why she has enough ego to have a working alliance most of the time. Except the times of being triggered into her one year nine month old trauma, she operates out of a neurotic structure, where self-reflection, psychic dialectic, observing ego, subjective self experience, and intersubjective dialectic are possible.

I interpret to Renee both sides of her *internal world* core psychic structure constellation. I am both experienced as the one being rejected on the unconscious level, and as the one rejecting her on a more conscious level. I help Renee understand her *internal world* in this way. She experiences a new sense of self agency and empowerment through conscious comprehension of her primal *internal world* constellations. When she connects such experience with memories that repeat her impotent states, and her defensive states, she grows to connect disparate part of herself, and becomes increasingly empowered. She becomes increasingly empowered to think for herself, and to figure things out for herself. We also see together how she has been negating her own original thoughts all her life. We also see how her thoughts leap out at her in a hurricane of manic energy, all mixed up. Consequently, she jumps too quickly from one thought to another, rather than persisting in shaping any individual thoughts into her creative writing. However, as Renee sees the connections between all the thoughts, through experiencing the feelings behind them in sessions, she is more able to focus and sustain a process of

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writing out her ideas, as the expressions of characters within short stories. As Renee's psychoanalyst, the writer in me has continual empathy for her. I think she feels this, even in states of writing block frustration now, as we continue on our journey.

### ***Conclusion: Two Sides of the Dark Side of Creativity***

This paper has focused on both the *compulsions* and *blocks in creativity*. In *compulsions to create*, the dissociated areas of a primal psyche operate out of dark psychic constellations. These dark psychic constellations manifest as eroticized bad objects, and *demon lover themes*. By contrast, when the treatment issue is related to blocks in creativity and writing, we see instead neurotic psychic structure, where repression is inhibiting as well as containing. In this latter case, dissociated phenomena from primal trauma is secondary in nature, while the suppression of the psyche by the internalized other and the unconscious fear of one's own aggression and instincts is of critical concern.

The contrast between the two psychic levels in writers, which correspond to the *paranoid-schizoid position* or *depressive position*, is outlined here. We have contrasted the two famous Bronte sisters, from the same family, who demonstrate different psychic levels that relate to compulsion versus capacity to mourn (depressive position). We have shown how the artist with narcissistic structure (Edith Sitwell) lacks the fundamental capacity to mourn. We looked at Emily Dickinson's and Emily Bronte's *demon lover complexes* that are a manifestation of a pathological mourning state, in which part object *demon lover themes* of victim/villain, dramas predominate. Then we visited my clinical consulting room, to witness the treatment of the other side of the psychic structure constellation in the *dark side of creativity*. We witnessed some of the process of a psychoanalytic patient who attends four sessions a week, on the couch, and her continual need to work through the many levels of blocking of her inspiration and of her capacity to writing. This patient came for treatment with the explicit request to resolve her writing block trauma, and the related unconscious conflicts.

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